

VZCZCXRO2472

OO RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR

DE RUEHAK #5149/01 2491409

ZNY CCCCC ZZH

O 061409Z SEP 06

FM AMEMBASSY ANKARA

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8445

INFO RUEHXK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK IMMEDIATE 1783

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE

RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL IMMEDIATE

RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE IMMEDIATE

RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHDC//J-3/J-5// IMMEDIATE

RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE

RUEUITH/ODC ANKARA TU//TCH// IMMEDIATE

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE

RUEUITH/TLO ANKARA TU IMMEDIATE

RUEHAK/USDAO ANKARA TU IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 005149

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/04/2021

TAGS: PREL PGOV USUN LE TU

SUBJECT: TURKISH PARLIAMENT VOTES TO DEPLOY TROOPS TO LEBANON

REF: A. ANKARA 5098

1B. ANKARA 5020

1C. ANKARA 4978

Classified By: Ambassador Ross Wilson for reasons 1.4(b),(d)

11. (C) Summary. The Turkish parliament approved the government's motion to contribute troops to UNIFIL in a September 5 extraordinary assembly session. PM Erdogan exerted control over his Justice and Development Party (AKP) with a well-orchestrated outreach campaign that dissolved or muted most intra-party dissent and ensured AKP unity on a publicly unpopular issue (reftels). The opposition used the session to lambaste the US and Israel in an attempt to paint Erdogan's government as lackeys willing to sell Turkey out. It also used continued PKK violence as a reason to vote against the motion. The PM's team countered the vitriol calmly, but the opposition will continue to use anti-American, anti-Israeli sentiment as a club with which to beat the government. End Summary.

12. (U) After six hours of debate, MPs voted 340 in favor and 192 opposed, with one abstention, in favor of the AKP's motion to send Turkish troops to Lebanon. The PM was in attendance. FM Gul, making the case for the GOT, stressed Turkey's long term interest in regional stability. He underscored that the three prerequisites for Turkish participation had been met: a UN resolution authorizing the mission, Israeli and Lebanese government requests for Turkish troops, and assurances that the international force would not be engaged in disarming combatants. Gul added that sending Turkish troops, who would stand with NATO and European forces, is also consistent with Turkey's goal of joining the EU and might put Turkey in good stead in its effort to obtain a temporary UNSC seat in 2009-2010.

13. (C) Opposition deputies used their allotted speaking time, plus several other slots they wangled by manipulating procedural rules, to launch a vitriolic attack against the ruling AKP, using the US and Israel in particular as weapons for bashing the government. Deputies of the Republican People's Party (CHP) repeatedly derided Secretary Rice and her call for a "new Middle East" and claimed that the US and Israel aim to re-draw the region's borders. They charged the AKP with merely doing the bidding of the US, Israel and the "Zionists" in line with plans for a "greater Middle East".

CHP vice chair Onur Oymen refuted Gul's claims that Lebanon wants Turkish troops. He warned that Turkish soldiers would in fact be called on to engage in combat, embroiling Turkey for the first time in a Middle Eastern conflict. Instead, Turkish soldiers should be fighting the PKK who are attacking Turkish citizens, he charged. Motherland Party (ANAVATAN) leader Erkan Mumcu echoed Oymen's points and accused the US of fomenting conflict in order to maintain a military force in the energy rich region. AKP leaders countered opposition attacks, again emphasizing that it is in Turkey's interest to play a role in stabilizing the Middle East region.

¶4. (C) The government's motion specifies that Turkey's contribution will consist of patrolling naval units, sea and air transport support, force protection units for Turkish humanitarian assistance teams and training for the Lebanese military. Further details may emerge following PM Erdogan's September 6 meetings with UNSYG Annan and TGS Chief of Staff Buyukanit. Ambassador has been promised a readout on the details of Turkey's UNIFIL deployment by MFA Deputy U/S Uzumcu.

¶5. (C) Public opposition to committing troops remains high. Informal electronic polls on websites of several major media organizations indicated that 70 percent to 84 percent of those responding opposed a troop deployment. Large-scale demonstrations took place outside of parliament and in the Ankara city center, with between 2,000 and 5,000 people chanting anti-war slogans. Police were out in force. No major clashes were reported. Protests also took place in Istanbul, Izmir, Antalya and Mersin.

¶6. (C) Comment. The vote went as the GOT had planned. Asked for comment as he exited parliament, Erdogan said it was as

ANKARA 00005149 002 OF 002

he had predicted the previous day: no surprises. He successfully solidified AKP support on a highly unpopular issue. The deployment is a political risk for Erdogan - he has gambled on a regional role for Turkey, expending substantial political capital. If Turkish troops are killed and/or the UNIFIL mission fails, AKP will pay a price. Both Gul and Erdogan acknowledged that AKP knowingly shouldered this responsibility. The public and opposition alike will be watching carefully as Turkey's UNIFIL role is further defined. As much as this vote was an indication of how much AKP has matured, the debate put on show the secular opposition parties' reliance on anti-Americanism and anti-Israeli sentiment as weapons for bashing PM Erdogan's allegedly Islamist government. Erdogan and the AKP make their share of gaffes and are themselves guilty of fanning the public opinion fires too, including on Lebanon during the war. In this case, however, they have done the right thing -- despite misgivings among their constituents and the country at large. End Comment.

Visit Ankara's Classified Web Site at  
<http://www.state.sgov/p/eur/ankara/>

WILSON